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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to change parents' attitudes toward their children's learning, so that parents would understand the importance of student-centered and student-directed learning activities and have a better understanding of their children's actual learning activities. An initial telephone survey of four parents of students in a combined grade two-three class found that three considered teacher-directed activities more conducive to learning than student-directed activities. To help change this attitude, a 12-week program of increased teacher-parent interaction on the students' reading, spelling, and mathematics activities was implemented. This included having the teacher work with individual students on an activity during a parent visit to the classroom, sending photographs of a classroom activity home with students, and writing letters to parents about classroom activities. A questionnaire was forwarded to the parents of 21 students at the end of the program, with the goal of having the parents of at least 11 students express favorable attitudes toward student-directed active learning. Although 10 of the 11 responses were highly or somewhat supportive of active learning instruction, the poor response rate resulted in none of the four expected outcomes being achieved. (A copy of the parent questionnaire is appended.) (MDM)

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ED 371 897

Changing Parents' Understanding of Learning in a Grade Two-Three Classroom Through Teacher Contacts

by

Betty Johnston

Cluster 56

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A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Jill Murray

Jill Murray

Lead Teacher

O. M. MacKillop School, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada

April 26, 1994

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Betty Johnston under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

May 18, 1994

Date of Final Approval of Report

June S. Delano

Dr. J. Delano, Ph.D., Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Changing Parents' Understanding of Learning in a Grade Two-Three Classroom Through Teacher Contacts. Johnston, Betty A., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova University,Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies.

This practicum sought to respond to the problem that parents' views of their children's learning differed from the teacher's view. For twelve weeks the teacher informed parents about their child's activities related to reading, spelling and mathematics by: working with the child on an activity during a parent/teacher visit, sending a photograph of a classroom activity home and by writing a letter to each parent about classroom activities.

A questionnaire was forwarded to parents at the end of the practicum. While 10 of the 11 responses were highly supportive or somewhat supportive of "active learning" instruction, the 50% response rate resulted in none of the four expected outcomes being achieved.

Discussion of the outcomes permitted insights into the change process and prompted direction re: future practicum efforts which relate to changing parent attitudes towards children's learning.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

Schools are all alike in certain ways but each is unique in its own way. This school sat at the end of a street in an upper middle class community in Ontario. It was a long building where children moved from Kindergarten through to Grade 8 by moving from a classroom at the front of the school, down the hallway, until they reached Grade 8, at which time they graduated and moved to secondary school.

Each morning, White, Chinese and Muslim children arrived on the playground. They had either walked a short distance from their well maintained homes to school or climbed off of one of the three buses after riding for approximately 20 minutes from one of the three subdivisions where homes had been built between 1990 and 1993.

The children were well dressed and appeared to be well cared for. Their parents or nannies had ensured that they arrived with a nutritious lunch and some would have money to purchase a drink at the school's juice machine.

Parents of the children at this school would have said good-bye to their children and proceeded to

professional or business positions. Some of these students had parents who were teachers, while others had parents who operated their own business. There were also parents who worked for others as middle managers.

The students would holiday in a warm country or go sailing during the winter break. They would go camping or to the cottage during the summer. Their parents would ensure they took lessons after school as well as join clubs.

These parents were welcomed at the school. They introduced themselves by their first name to the teachers. Assistance in the library, classrooms and publishing centre was appreciated. Two parents worked to supervise classrooms and the playground each day. The majority of parents, however, remained invisible unless they were asked to come to the school. These parents would probably attend a "meet the teacher" evening in September, a parent/teacher conference and a celebration of the arts in December and then complete their visitations to the school by touring the classroom in April, during Education Week. Opportunities to attend PTA meetings offered parents involvement in supporting the school by assisting in raising money through pizza day lunches and other fund raising events. The parents at this school wanted the

best education possible for their children and they worked to ensure that their children received it.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

Knowledge about the parent population of a school comes with the lived experience of coming to know the setting. The writer had worked in this school for the previous five years. This represented one quarter of the writer's professional teaching career.

For each of the five years, the writer had been assigned to teach a split Grade 2-3 class. The classroom was located halfway down the hallway on the left side. The door was always open in order that parents and hallway pedestrians had an opportunity to discover what was happening. A glance into the classroom revealed a "busyness". There were interesting objects to touch and to look at: a deer's head hanging on the wall, a turtle in an acquarium, a windowsill which ran the entire length of the room and displayed projects in some state of completion. The classroom had huge spaces for movement and one large set of tables with chairs for the children to sit and write. A sand table and water table sat on linoleum, which took up about one quarter of the floor space. Blocks, paints, construction toys, books, orff instruments and mathematical

manipulative materials were all available for student use. The room presented a contemporary attitude towards education. Parents saw the writer as a strict teacher who offered a creative program to her students.

Some parents were the same age or younger than the writer. In order to get acquainted with parents, the writer visited as many children as possible in September before school began. A visit to the home in the late afternoon offered an opportunity to meet the student and parent(s). Each month, a newsletter was forwarded to the parents to describe the activities which had been planned to foster learning for the month.

Parents were welcome to volunteer to assist in the classroom and for the 1993-1994 year, four parents showed an interest in working with children. Two mothers came once a week, in the afternoon, to prepare materials and hear children read. One father came each week to work with a group of children in the computer lab and one mother, who had drama training, came twice each month to introduce dramatic experiences to the children in the gym.

The writer also had an opportunity to greet six mothers each day as they met their children at the end of school. Exchanges about the child's activities during the day, were frequent. Opportunities to see parents

frequently permitted interaction with 9 of the 21 families in the class.

The first impression of this school situation might be that it was ideal. Only when one listened carefully and remained in the setting long enough, did one become disturbed. People who live in well maintained homes with manicured lawns want education to be as precise as their domestic environment. Tinkering and disorderly contributions are tolerated but education which is clean and tidy promotes the proper impression of learning.

One mother commented, in September, that she was delighted that her child would learn to print this year since she never had lessons and her printing was attrocious. As a professional, the teacher sees printing as the ability to co-ordinate four operations at one time. Given this requirement, it is understandable that children's efforts appear unappealing.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

While the parents at this school were supportive of education, discussions concerning their children's learning indicated that the parents' knowledge of children's learning was frequently expressed in terms of student deficits. Parents' views of children's learning differed from educators'.

Problem Documentation

Parental perceptions related to education were gathered in a telephone survey during the summer of 1993. The following results supported the statement of the problem.

According to three of the four parents telephoned, teacher direction was the best way for children to learn. One of the four parents stated that children learned best by "doing".

A second question revealed that three of the four parents contacted, reported that practise, either verbal or written, would help children in Grades 2 and 3 to do better in mathematics. Only one of the four parents stated that building with geometrical sahpes would assist

children in learning mathematics.

It was also reported by three of the four parents that teacher involvement in the reading program through instruction--sounding out, tests, reading in a group--would improve reading in Grade 2 or 3 while one of the four parents felt that providing a choice of material and promoting opportunities to read with the teacher would improve reading.

Regarding spelling, three of the four parents felt that direction through dictation, corrections or demonstration of accuracy on spelling lists would improve spelling in Grade 2 or 3 while one of the four parents felt that the children's ability to sound out words would improve spelling ability.

Causative Analysis

The problem may have developed due to the personal experiences parent remembered from their own schooling. These beliefs about education, experienced in previous decades, may cause parents to prescribe educational experiences from the past for their children.

Another cause may be that a lack of communication exists between the parents and the school. If parents are not informed concerning contemporary education, they will have difficulty in understanding what their

child is learning.

A further possible cause may be related to the parents' expectation that children are required to succeed in school because the parent is successful. School achievement is a reflection of the parent's success.

While these notions may be valid, it is necessary to examine the literature in order to gain a better understanding of the causes of parent and teacher differences in viewing learning.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The notion that parents' expectations differ from educators' has been argued by Elkind (1987). As an authority on child development, Elkind criticizes parent practices which push young children to achieve early. According to Elkind, young children attend organized sessions in order to arrive in school performing beyond their years. Natural development is replaced by miseducation.

While all parents do not attempt to educate their children with the zeal that Elkind describes, educational administrators have voiced the observation that parent expectations are higher than teacher expectations (Hughes, Burgess & Maxam, 1991).

Support for this observation has been evident in

a qualitative study (Tizzard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar, Plewis, 1988) which examined life in a school and discovered that more parents than teachers indicated that their children were underachieving. Unknown to the teachers, parents took steps to influence their child's schooling by working with math at home. The math pages which students worked on at home were found to relate to more advanced concepts than the math studied at school.

Further evidence of the different expectations held by parents and teachers has been reported by business. Educational entrepreneurs have capitalized upon the parent dissatisfaction with the school system and set up tutorial services. In an article, Graybill (1992) acknowledged that parents felt that teachers failed to teach their children and this prompted the parents to seek education outside of the school system.

Confirmation relating to parent expectations was documented in a study which examined Grade 2 and Grade 5 students' abilities (Miller, 1991). Parents of students in both grade levels overestimated what their child could do and what a group of children could do.

While the "parent push" has been recognized in the literature, consideration of the causes which have been responsible for the problem have attempted to examine the problem in a variety of ways.

Explanations of Differing Parent/Teacher Expectations

Parents are the child's first teachers and the effect they have on their children may determine the child's learning. Wagner and Phillips (1992) discovered that father encouragement was associated with third graders' ability to solve problems. While father warmth was related positively to their son's attempts to solve problems, it was related negatively to their daughter's problem solving attempts. This study appears to conflict with earlier work (Felson, 1990) which reported that mothers had a strong effect upon achievemnt in elementary school.

Other theorists would interpret these findings as an indication of the parents' knowledge about children and place this knowledge into a hierarchy of understanding (Sameroff & Feil, 1985). High socioeconomic status parents were found to hold a different view of children than low socioeconomic status. The view held by high socioeconomic parent recognizes the significance of experience in the child's life. This translates into the belief that educational experiences should enhance the child's abilities. This would explain why parents would become upset when their child reports having played at school all day, if they believe that play experiences are associated with pleasurable leisure time.

An alternate explanation postulates that parents and teachers have different expectations concerning the child due to the roles they play (Lightfoot, 1982) in the child's life. Parents form a primary relationship with their child while teachers form a secondary relationship. This view defines an antagonistic relationship between parents and the teacher as a natural outcome. It recognizes the viewpoint of the parents who are solely responsible for the child from birth onward. This responsibility according to the parents, permits them to decide what is best for the child. Examination of the teacher's view, sees the teacher as a professional expert who has training and experience and this position permits stating what is best for the child. An adversarial relationship results and conflict between the parents and the teacher is inevitable.

In this relationship, the teacher's understanding of learning is related to child development and a belief that play provides the impetus for young children to develop understanding. This contrasts with the parent's understanding that learning requires showing and telling. When teachers implement practices which relate to allowing children to play and learn naturally,

parents criticize the method (Black & Puckett, 1984). This criticism suggests that educators do not teach (Kanner, 1990; Lareau, 1989) and results in parents and teachers differing in their expectations of children. The question of what is good for the child is at odds with what is right for the child.

Further examination of the school system reveals other factors that explain the different expectations held by parents and teachers. A lack of communication between parents and the teacher surfaced as a probable reason for different views. Parents reported that lack of time and feeling of inferiority were reasons for having little contact with the school (Revenaugh, 1992).

Teachers, however, have been reluctant to foster communication with parents. In a study carried out by Johns Hopkins Univeristy (1983), 70% of the parents reported never helping the teachers in the classroom. Only 36% of parents attended parent/teacher conferences but 80% read with their children at home. Visits by teachers were rare since 96% of parents reported never having been visited by teachers.

The various explanations expressed by researchers have resulted due to the field of interest that each was associated with--psychology, sociology, child development. Continuing to focus upon factors which divide

teachers and parents gives an inadequate indication of how they can build a common understanding of children's learning.

Consideration of what can be accomplished when communication occurs permits a re-examination of teacher/parent expectations and promotes further understanding of the problem.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal which follows and the outcomes listed belown were projected for this practicum.

Parents will express children's learning according to the behaviors the child possesses. This will foster a similar view concerning learning that parents and teachers will hold.

Expected Outcomes

To attain the goal, the following four outcomes were defined.

1. On a questionnaire (see Appendix), completed by parents, 11 of the 21 parents will express the need for children to learn through active involvement with materials as represented by a total score which favours active learning over traditional learning in questions 4, 5 and 6 of the questionnaire.

2. On a parent questionnaire (see Appendix), 11 of the 21 parents will express favouring the use of manipulative materials in Grade 2 or 3 in order to learn mathematics as displayed in responses 2 and 5.

3. On a parent questionnaire (see Appendix), 11 of the 21 parents will express, through responses to questions 1 and 4, favouring the need for students in Grade 2 or 3 to demonstrate an interest in reading in order to improve reading.

4. On a parent qeustionnaire (see Appendix), 11 of the 21 parents will express, through responses to questions 3 and 6, favouring children's spelling in Grade 2 or 3, through a natural method over a traditional spelling method.

Measurement of Outcomes

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was designed in order to determine parent knowledge related to: reading, spelling and mathematics, following the 12 week practicum. The first three questions, as well as the last response--question 7-- provided qualitative data (opinions, comments, personal observations) from parents; while quantitative data permitted calculating a score related to parents' support for active learning due to responses to questions 4,5 and 6.

Data resulting from quantitative responses--questions 4,5,6--were tallied and representation of the total support for active learning was placed in a figure in order to show the number of parents who were highly supportive

(total score = 1-4 points) of active learning in Grade 2 or 3.

The questonnaire appeared to be a speedy method to collect information but allowed enough time for consideration of responses since parents had the school week in order to complete it. It also served to signal the end of the teacher contacts for the term since the winter holiday started immediately following the return of the questionnaires.

Over the twelve weeks, parents may have commented about their understanding of teaching practices but the questionnaire provided for a formal collection of information which gave each parent equal opportunity to express their views. Three types of responses were required: an indication of their child's progress related to math, an indication of their child's progress related to reading and an indication of their child's progress related to spelling. Parents were also required to choose from two statements in order to determine which descriptor they felt applied to a good reader, speller and mathematician in Grade 2 or 3. The final response asked parents to record their opinion about the parent contacts over the twelve week period.

In order to ensure that the questionnaire was delivered to the parent by the child, each questionnaire was placed in an envelope and addressed to the parent(s). This distribution of the questionnaire--via the child as courier--allowed parents to provide feedback without disruption to their home and work schedules. Children returned the completed questionnaires to the teacher and they were immediately placed in a file in order to ensure anonymity. Since parents were asked to circle which grade their child was in, responses were anonymous and this allowed parents a degree of confidence in responding truthfully.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

Since parents' views concerning their children's learning differ from teachers' views, it was necessary to consider approaches in order to resolve the problem.

Literature related to developing parent support suggested the importance of sharing specific information frequently with parents (Bruneau, Basinski, Shehan, 1992). This communication can take a variety of forms--newsletters, conferences, meetings, telephone discussions, visits to the classroom (Cowden, 1989). These types of communication require that the parent become more visible in the school. When this occurs, educators may assume that a relationship exists between parent support and visibility in the school.

According to Maeroff (1992), parent support of education occurs both directly and indirectly. Indirect support occurs outside of school and relates to taking time to: ensure the child gets to school, provide money for school activities, assist children at home with school related activities, ask about the child's day. A broader definition of the concept of "support" requires that the home environment be included as "parent support".

Investigations related to parents' understanding of their child(ren)'s education assume that if parents were better informed about education, this would eliminate the disagreement between parents and teachers. To achieve this goal, parent education programs were set up and parents were given an opportunity to hear about specific educational topics. This model assumes that parents lack abilities related to positive educational experiences (Kusting, 1991). It defines two groups of parents--the "educated" or "supportive" parents and the "uneducated" or "unsupportive" parents. While teachers' intentions may have been good and they should be complimented for the initiative, a lecture "setting" may be a less productive forum for promoting "educated parents".

When parents believed they could assist their children with education, the parents spent time volunteering in the classroom, fostering educational activities at home and making fewer telephone calls to the school (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, Brissie, 1992). The positive results which occur, once parents believe they can assist their child with education, suggest that another type of interaction might be more productive for teachers to initiate. This would require formal

settings in which parents and the teacher could interact.

It is important for educators to understand the milieu that develops when parents do take time to volunteer in classrooms. Lareau's work (1981) found that upper middle class parents who were involved in the school were able to customize their child's education. Since they know the teachers and programs, these parents were more likely to intervene on the child's behalf. Lower class parents were less visible in the school and less likely to request changes in their child's education since they felt that the education their child was receiving was satisfactory. Offering parents opportunities to volunteer in schools may, inadvertently, ensure differences in social classes.

Glancing beyond the surface appears to force teachers to close their doors to parents. However, another model of parent interaction has been advanced and requires consideration.

Schaeffer (1991) promoted a co-operative family orientation as a way for teachers to approach parents. This suggests that teachers undertake collaborative efforts with parents. Baskwill (1989) used family relationships as a metaphor to offer teachers a way to reach all parents. She explained how families keep

in touch via telephone calls, letters, photographs and family get togethers. She translated this idea into a way to communicate with parents of kindergarten children. Baskwill's practical approach to working with parents offers the classroom teacher a solution to the problem.

A more controlled study (Kusting, 1991) concerning parent-teacher views of learning, explored collaboration between parents and educators. Parents were invited to observe their children in a university laboratory preschool program. The parents kept running records of their child's actions and then discussed their observations with the preschool co-ordinator. Results indicated that the parents' understanding of children's learning increased.

Given the results of collaborative work with parents, the literature offers a model which encourages the teacher and parent(s) to observe and discuss a child's efforts which relate to learning.

Description of Selected Solution

Over a period of twelve weeks, parents were contacted in four ways: parent/teacher visits (Kusting, 1991), telephone conversations, a "keeping in touch" letter and a photograph of the child engaging in an activity (Baskwill, 1989). One aspect of the curriculum--reading, mathematics

or spelling--permitted contacting parents every four weeks. It was proposed that parents would gain an understanding of their child's learning through direct and indirect observations as well as in discussions with the teacher.

According to Schon (1982), the understandings people reach, develop due to the discussion they engage in. This understanding points to the need for collaborative efforts betweeen parents and teachers. Each family, therefore, was contacted in a number of ways each month. During the first four weeks, attention was given to reading; while in weeks 5-8, attention was given to mathematics and in weeks 9-12, attention was given to spelling.

Each family received a "keeping in touch" letter (Baskwill, 1989) once, within the four week period for each specific subject (reading, math, spelling). The parent was asked to respond to a question concerning the subject.

A photograph (Black & Puckett, 1987) was forwarded to the parent(s) once, every four weeks. The child wrote an explanation of what the activity was, that was shown in the photograph.

A telephone call (Baskwill, 1989) to the parents permitted discussion of the child's abilities for each of the subjects.

A parent/teacher visit permitted an opportunity for the parent to observe the child's ability in a specific subject as s/he worked at a particular task (Kusting, 1991).

At the end of twelve weeks, a questionnaire (see Appendix) was sent home with each student and each parent was asked to return the questionnaire to the teacher by the end of the week.

Report of the Action Taken

Teachers might be tempted to initiate change in September when a new school year begins, since a new year brings new inspiration. Once the year begins, patterns of behavior are set and routines are established and the teacher hesitates to disrupt the schedule. The teacher confronts problems and reflects upon solutions. Minor adjustments may be made but major behavior changes take time to plan and design as well as to gather the courage to attempt the unexplored.

Since this practicum started at the beginning of December, 1993 and continued throughout the second term of the school year, the effort truly represents change. It required redefining how the teacher allocates time. For 12 weeks, this practicum required the teacher to plan opportunities for students to take a photograph

of a particular activity that the child had completed in class and to ensure that each child wrote about the activity in order to take the photograph home. After school, for 12 weeks, the teacher spent time visiting parents, either in their homes or in the classroom and following each visit, the teacher recorded thoughts and reactions related to the visit in a log. A total of 50 visits were made throughout the 12 weeks. Each parent received a "keeping in touch" letter once every four weeks and a telephone call was made to parents once every four weeks.

This practicum provided the opportunity for the practitioner to redefine the frequency and quality of information provided to parents. Opportunities to contact parents in several ways across a three month period--one school term--demonstrated the teacher's willingness to inform parents about their child's educational endeavours.

A schedule of visits, telephone calls, photo opportunities and letters to be sent home was proposed and is displayed as Figure 1. According to this schedule five or six families were to be contacted each week across each of the types of proposed parent contacts. While the schedule worked nicely for structuring the taking of photographs in the classroom, flexability became essential in visiting and forwarding information to

Figure 1 Calendar Plan

Month One - Schedule for Contacting Parents

Curriculum Focus - Reading

	# Families Contacted			
	5 families	5 families	5 families	6 families
Week 1	photo & comments	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call
Week 2	telephone call	photo & comments	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter
Week 3	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call	photo & comments	parent visit
Week 4	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call	photo & comments

Curriculum Focus - Mathematics

	# Families Contacted			
	5 families	5 families	5 families	6 families
Week 5	photo & comments	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call
Week 6	telephone call	photo & comments	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter
Week 7	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call	photo & comments	parent visit
Week 8	Parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call	photo & comments

Curriculum Focus - Spelling

	# Families Contacted			
	5 families	5 families	5 families	6 families
Week 9	photo & comments	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call
Week 10	telephone call	photo & comments	parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter
Week 11	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call	photo & comments	parent visi
Week 12	Parent visit	"keeping in touch" letter	telephone call	photo & comments

parents. The schedule, therefore, served as a key to setting targets for each week.

Forecasting unexpected events which will occur during a practicum is difficult. It is not easy to determine what will occur. Discussion of these events provides helpful information for future efforts. Given this need to recognize unexpected events, the following experiences represent the unexpected events which occured during this practicum.

Setting an appointment requires co-operation of two parties--the appointment seeker (teacher) and the appointment confirmer (parent). Since the teacher works in a classroom all day, it is necessary to make appointments to talk to parents after school--in the late afternoon or evening--or, before school--in the morning. When teachers are free,parents may be busy--preparing meals, caring for children, working. Attempts to telephone may be convenient for one party but not for the other. Setting a time to meet each other requires consideration of schedules--mealtime, bedtime, morning routines. It also requires becoming familiar with family events--vacation plans, religious practices. Once the appointment is made, the unexpected may occur--sickness, inclement weather, lapse in remembering the

appointment. These three factors affected the schedule of contacts. Certain weeks permitted as many as eight parent contacts while other weeks allowed as few as three parent visits. A target of meeting with each parent once within a four week period became reasonable. Parents who were unable to meet with the teacher in a four week period were contacted during the fifth week in order to schedule an appointment early in the next round of contacts.

The schedule required focussing upon specific aspects of the curriculum: reading, spelling, mathematics. The reality of contacting parents four times each month required consideration about which aspects of reading, spelling or mathematics should be highlighted. This required the teacher to decide what to focus upon when talking to parents, writing to parents and showing parents what the child did on a specific day (see Figure 2).

It became apparent in defining which aspects of the curriculum would be shared with parents that once parents had received a photograph, a letter and had the opportunity to meet with the teacher, that a telephone call would be redundant. This prompted changing the telephone conversations to telephone calls in order to make appointments. Sunday evenings and school hour preparation periods were used in order to telephone parents.

Figure 2 Focus for Parent Contacts

Type of Contact	Curriculum Area		
	Reading	Math	Spelling
Photograph	"read and do" science or cooking activity	building with shapes	making words from words on a chart story
Keeping in Touch letter	-outline child's instructional reading level and observations of child's reading of unfamiliar rext.	-outline child's knowledge of adding and subtracting, ability to tell time, vocabulary used related to shapes.	-outline opportunities to spell at school-penpal letters, personal stories, explanations of activities.
Parent Visit	-indicate child's leisure reading level. Child reads to teacher and parent and shares comments written in reading journal about book.	-focus on geometry and arithmetic. Child shows how to make 2-D shapes and how to add and subtract two digit numbers using manipulative materials.	-child reads personal writing efforts to teacher and parents. Teacher models sounding out words and drawing attention to sounds in words.

Visits with parents were arranged before school from 8:00 - 8:30 a.m. or after school and in the evening, at the parent's convenience. Visits were scheduled as late as 7:30 - 8:30 p.m. during the week and as late as 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. on Friday evenings. No appointments were made on weekends.

In spite of telling parents during December interviews and in the class newsletter about the teacher's intention to contact them in several ways each month, throughout the second term, parents expressed a variety of reactions when a visit was requested. Some parents thought their child was doing poorly in school or had misbehaved. It was necessary to assure these parents that the purpose of the contacts was to inform them about how specific subjects were being taught.

The schedule of contacts (Figure 1) required that photographs and "keeping in touch" letters would be sent to approximately five parents each week. Once the practicum began, it was more convenient to write the "keeping in touch" letters all at once and send them home on one day. The "keeping in touch" folder was made by folding an 8½" x 11" sheet of construction paper and pasting a sheet of paper with the name of the folder and the child's name on the front. Information asking

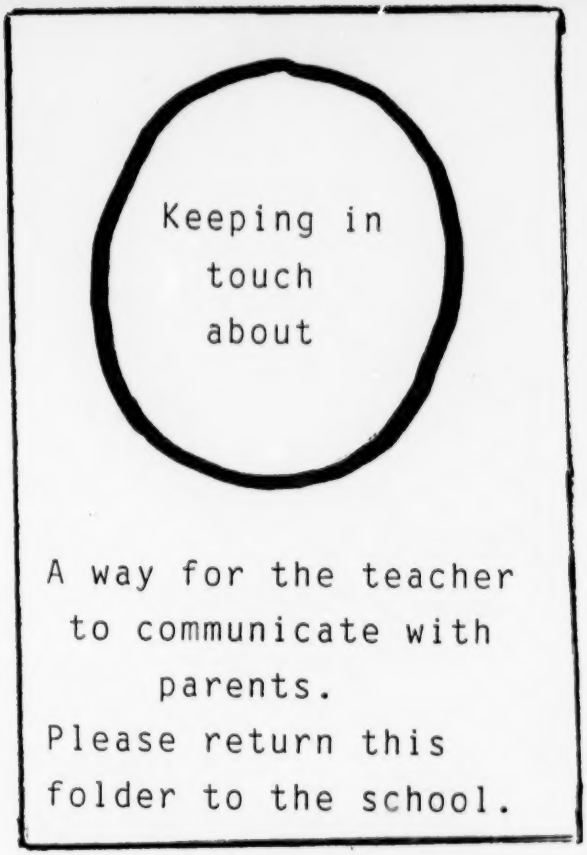
parents to return the folder to the teacher also appeared on the front of the folder (see Figure 3). The letter for the parents was stapled on the inside, right page of the folder and information which was sought concerning the subject was placed on the left page of the inside of the folder. Returned folders were used for future letters. A new "keeping in touch" folder was made if parents did not return the folder. Following the 12 week practicum, the parent letters were kept in order to continue "keeping in touch" each month until the end of the school year, at which time the folder will be forwarded with the child's report card to the parent.

Photographs were taken by children of the work they completed in class on one occasion. Each child mounted the photo on a card and it was sent to the child's parents once every four weeks. All photographs for the class were sent on the same day. Children explained the activity in writing and dated the card.

The children especially enjoyed using the polaroid camera. It was originally planned to use the school's polaroid camera but this camera was being used by another teacher and this required purchasing a personal camera. Film was also purchased personally.

Figure 3

"Keeping in Touch" Folder



Front Page

Contents Placed Inside Folder

Sample insert

READING TO YOUR CHILD

Did you know that The Children's Book Store is now located at: 2532 Yonge St.
(6 blocks north of Eglinton
- Yonge at St. Clements

During the March Break, Mariposa in the Schools Entertainers will be performing daily. This is free. (telephone 480-0233)
- March 12 - 20, 1994.

Can you let me know:

How often do you read to your child?

daily on weekends occasionally never

Who chooses what will be read?

parent child

How long do you spend reading to your child at one time?

Do you read in another language besides English when reading to your child?

Letter to Parent from teacher stapled on right side of folder.

The transfer of students in or out of a class is impossible to control. During the twelve week practicum, three students transfered into the classroom. While these children's parents were contacted in the same ways at the 21 original parents, they did not receive a questionnaire at the end of the 12 weeks. The prac-- ticum reports on 21 parents. However, in reality 24 parents were contacted during the 12 week period.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

This practicum sought to respond to the problem that parents' views of children's learning differed from educators' views by informing parents about school activities in a variety of ways over a twelve week period.

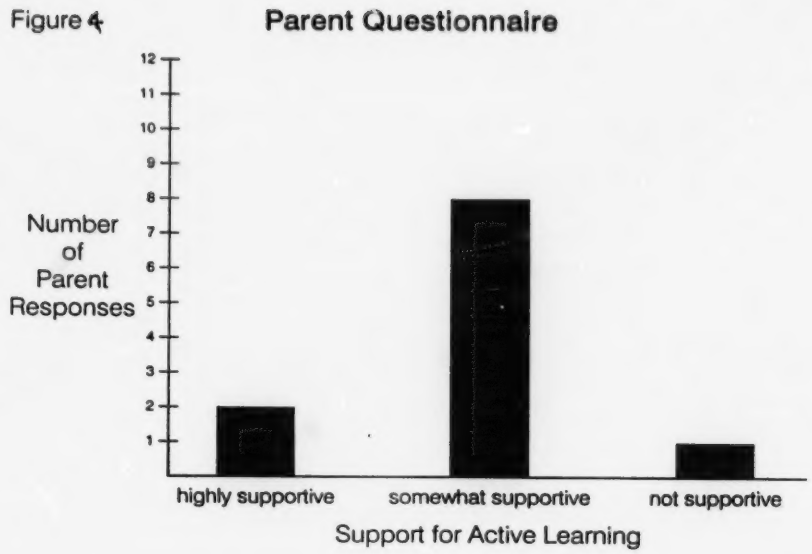
The first expected outcome of the practicum was stated as follows:

Outcome 1. On a questionnaire (see Appendix) completed by parents, 11 of the 21 parents will express the need for children to learn through active involvement with materials as represented by a total score which favours active learning over traditional learning in questions 4,5 and 6 of the questionnaire.

Questions 4,5 and 6 were scored and a total score out of 12 was obtained (see Figure 4). Ten of the 11 parents who responded to the questionnaire were highly or somewhat supportive of active learning. These parents received scores between 5-12 on questions 4,5 and 6 on the questionnaire. One of the 11 parents was not supportive of active learning and this person's score was between 1-4 on questions 4,5 and 6 on the questionnaire.

These results indicate that this outcome was not reached.

Figure 4



The second expected outcome of the practicum was:

Outcome 2. On a parent questionnaire (see Appendix), 11 of the 21 parents will express favouring the use of manipulative materials in Grade 2 or 3 in order to learn mathematics as displayed in responses 2 and 5.

Items selected by parents for questions 5 indicated that 8 of 11 parents chose two or less items which were related to the use of manipulative materials in mathematics. This indicated that eight parents were not supportive of manipulative materials in mathematics (see Table 1). Three of the 11 parents were considered somewhat or highly supportive of manipulative materials in mathematics since they chose three of four responses

Table 1

Scores Indicated by Parents According to Specific Curriculum Areas

Curriculum Area	Levels of Support		
	Highly Supportive Scores	Somewhat Supportive Scores	Not Supportive Scores
Mathematics	1	2	8
Reading	1	3	7
Spelling	2	4	5

Note: Highly supportive scores represent 4/4 statements favouring active learning. Somewhat supportive scores represent 3/4 statements favouring active learning. Not supportive scores represent 0 - 2/4 statements favouring active learning.

which related to the use of manipulative materials in mathematics.

Qualitative comments (see Table 2) suggest that five parents reported their child's progress related to manipulative materials and five parents reported progress according to traditional mathematics programs. One parent did not respond to the question related to reporting mathematics progress.

These results indicate that outcome 2 was not achieved.

The third expected outcome of the practicum was:

Outcome 3. On a parent questionnaire, 11 of the 21 parents will express through responses to questions 1 and 4, favouring the need for students in Grade 2 or 3 to demonstrate an interest in reading in order to improve reading.

Qualitative data appears to conflict with the qualitative results obtained from questions 1 and 4. Eight parents reported progress for their child according to activities related to interest in reading, while two parents reported progress according to a traditional basal reader program. One parent did not respond to question one (see Table 2).

Parent comments suggested that 8 of the 11 parents supported literature based programs. Quantitative

Table 2

Parent Comments Regarding Child's Progress

Curriculum Area	Type of Support: Traditional	Type of Support: Active Learning
Mathematics	(n = 5)	(n = 5)
	- responds orally without paper and pencil.[2]	- plays with calculator.
	- uses skill (adding) in real life math.	- tells time.
	- adds and subtracts better.	- looks for efficient ways to solve problems.
	- shows ability to add, subtract, multiply and divide.	- builds and makes models.
		- counts money.
Reading	(n = 2)	(n = 8)
	- reads more difficult books.	- reads frequently.
	- attempts to pronounce new words.	- shares stories that s/he is reading. [2]
		- brings home books frequently from school. [2]
		- interested in specific authors. [3]
		- reads longer books [2]
Spelling	(n = 2)	(n = 6)
	- words that are spelled incorrectly should be marked wrong. [2]	- plays games (scrabble).
		- personal writing (stories) has improved. [4]
		- spells without asking anyone.

Note: [x] shows frequency of comment

results tabulated for question 4 indicate that 7 of the 11 parents chose items which were not supportive of literature based programs, since they chose two or less statements which described reading according to a literature based program. Four parents chose items which were somewhat or highly supportive of literature based programs since they chose three of four statements which described reading related to a literature based program (see Table 1).

Since 11 of the 21 parents did not favour the need for Grades 2 and 3 students to demonstrate an interest in reading in order to improve reading, outcome 3 was not achieved.

The fourth exprected outcome of the practicum was:

Outcome 4. On a parent questionnaire (see Appendix), 11 of the 21 parents will express, through responses to questions 3 and 6, favouring children's spelling, in Grade 2 or 3, through a natural method over a traditional spelling class.

A count of parents who chose items which were supportive of spelling according to natural development indicated that 6 of 11 parents were somewhat or highly supportive of natural spelling since they chose three or four statements which related to natural spelling (see Table 1). Five of the 11 parents were not supportive

of a natural method of spelling since they chose up to two statements which were supportive of natural spelling (see Table 1).

There were six parents who made comments which appeared to favour a natural spelling method and two parents who commented in support of a traditional spelling method (see Table 2). Two parents did not comment on their child's progress.

Since 11 of the 21 parents did not favour the need for Grade 2 or 3 students to learn to spell using a natural method, the outcome was not acieved.

Discussion

The intention of this practicum was to ensure that parents expressed children's learning according to the behaviors the child possessed. This viewpoint would foster similar views held by parents and the teacher concerning learning. The outcomes set for this practicum were not reached and this necessitates examination of the results in light of the findings.

Probing into the Questionnaire

The realization of how parents see active learning became apparent in graphing support for active learning as displayed in Figure 4. Few parents are highly supportive of this type of learning while the majority of

parents are somewhat supportive (n = 8). The question regarding which aspects of active learning parents support arises and examination of responses related to choices made in questions 4,5 and 6 of the questionnaire prompts understanding of what the parents in this practicum did support.

There appears to be high support amongst parents for children to read for 20 minutes each day and to talk about the book. Parents also highly supported students reading over a personally written story to highlight incorrect spelling. There is less support for children choosing easy books to read in reading while in mathematics, less support was shown for children to build a cube, show which container holds more and use manipulative objects to arrive at a response. In spelling, some parent (n = 4) support the child using a rule and misspelling the word. Some support (n = 8) was given for the child to sound out the word when the spelling was unknown and some support was given (n = 6) for the child noticing how words were spelled while reading. Little support was given (n = 2) for the child to skip words while reading when they encountered a difficult word.

Examination of this information (see Table 3) permits understanding about which aspects of reading,

mathematics and spelling need to be considered in talking to parents. This requires consideration as to which aspects of active learning, parents might be more willing to accept. Since there appears to be some support for one quarter of the items shown in Table 3, it would be advantageous to consider promoting active learning to parents related to these items.

A discussion of the parent support of active learning must recognize who responded to the questionnaire. The class was a split Grades Two and Three. From information provided on the questionnaire, 3 of the 8 Grade 2 parents responded to the questionnaire and 8 of the 13 Grade 3 parents responded to the questionnaire. The response rate was 50% which was lower than the estimated rate of 75%. Outcomes were written according to the number of students in the class and in order to meet the outcomes, it was necessary to have a higher response rate than 50%.

The reader might be lead to dismiss the practicum's value based on the quantitative results, but it is necessary to consider the qualitative aspects of the practicum. Comments made by parents concerning evidence of progress related to mathematics, reading and spelling (see Table 2) suggest that activities which are related

Table 3

Active Learning Choices Made by Parents on Questionnaire

Curriculum Area	Descriptor of Active Learning	Levels of Support: Highly Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Not Supportive
Reading	- spends 20 minutes a day reading.	10		
	- talks about the book.	9		
	- chooses books that are easy to read.		6	
	- skips words that s/he is unable to read.			2
Mathematics	- writes a story in which adding or subtracting occurs.		7	
	- builds a cube.			4
	- demonstrates which container holds more.		6	
	- uses manipulative objects to arrive at a response.			4
Spelling	- uses a rule and misspells word.			4
	- sounds out word when s/he does not know how to spell the word.	8		
	- notices how words are spelled when s/he reads.		6	
	- reads over a story and highlights words that may be spelled incorrectly.	10		

to active learning are more frequently mentionned when discussing reading and spelling. Parents appear to be accepting of activities at home--playing games, manipulating materials, writing personal stories, reading and discussing books. While quantitative results suggest that parents do not highly support these activities in schoo they do support them at home. Lightfoot's work (1982) which recognizes the adversarial role of the teacher and parent is reflected in this result.

The relationship which existed between the parents and the teacher can be supported with observations from the field notes. The ongoing record of the conversations which were noted in the teacher's log throughout the 12 weeks, provides further evidence about how parents see the child's ability to learn. Evidence of the adversarial relationship appeared to surface early in the practicum.

December 6, 1993

> After school, I went to "R's" house. His mother is lovely and his father was waiting for me in the car park, since I had not previously visited them. I met his sister who is three. "R's" mother made tea and tasty pastries. "R" read his book to his mother. She appeared to think his work at school was poorly done. "R" made a picture of himself

in summer and wrote about it. I listened to the story and explained that he was expanding his ideas- "The apple tree was filled with apples." When he was writing apple, "R" asked about the spelling. His father spelled it for him. I said "appel" was fine, but his father spelled it for him. I explained how "R" relied on the sounds he heard in order to spell. We looked at his work and I sounded out "tree" and "with" for him. He remembered "ing". "R's" father asked about English classes and I said I'd find out for him.

While some visits suggest differing opinions between the teacher and parent concerning the child's ability, other visits fostered a collegiality to form between the teacher and parent.

December 10, 1993

In the evening, I went to "J's" house. Upon sharing her writing, her mother said that the story sounded familiar. "J's" mother related how they had gone to the movies and the only available film was a film version of a Stephen King book. The story that "J" was writing followed the film's plot. The film was gruesome--a dead dog is included. "J's" writing may be an outlet for dealing with her fears.

Sharing school activities with parents had assisted in this instance, to understand the student. It revealed information which both the parent and teacher could relate to.

Fullan (1991) suggests that the teacher recognize complimentary roles held by teachers and parents. This was apparent during another visit.

December 14, 1993

> "A" shared his story of Lue and while he did this, I modelled how to sound out words. "A" had difficulty hearing the sounds. His mother sat on the couch and enjoyed his book. She asked about the name "Lue".
>
> "Is it like Luke Skywalker?"
>
> "No," he replied.
>
> "How can we help?" asked his mother.
>
> I said to continue with what they had been doing. I explained that allowing him to make up stories with lego permitted "A" to tell stories which might be considered adventure stories or mysteries or fantasy stories. I explained that the ability to story with figures provides the context to write. She nodded in agreement.

This idea of "complimentary activities" surfaced on another occasion with the parent proposing an activity.

February 9, 1994

"J" showed her mother the shape book she had worked at. She was able to make the second shape in the book but had difficulty with the third. We got an easier book and she showed how to make all 15 shapes. We got out the counting mat and showed how to use it. I gave her an addition equation which required adding two digit numbers and "J" completed the equation without the mat. I was surprised. Her mother explained that the math book they had purchased in the summer would be suitable now. While math workbooks are not what I would suggest that parents purchase, they want to help their children and what else is conveniently available?

The positive relationship fostered between a parent and teacher was also noted in letters forwarded from a parent.

Jan ry, 1994

Dear Miss Johnston

Thank you for "Keeping in Touch". We were pleased to hear that "S's" writing is developing well. She takes delight in writing for a variety of purposes.

Thanks again for your card and concern.

Feedback in the "Keeping in Touch" letter provided an opportunity for the parent to share enlightening information.

> "S" is a great fan of games. He enjoys many board games. At the cottage, he hopes for rainy days so we can play Monopoly all day. He plays all of the games listed above as well as Clue and Scrabble but Monopoly is "S's" favourite.

Parents' comments on the questionnaire concerning the contacts which had been made throughout the practicum were positive. There were six comments and they ranged from expressing a reaction--"excellent"--through positive remarks:

> I enjoy reading the comments in "Keeping in Touch" and the home visits have been fun and informative. I feel more aware of what my child is doing at school this year.

One parent provided the following insight:

> It is good to know what is being taught and when it is being taught. It is also helpful to know how to know how it is being taught so that we can give extra help at home.

Although outcomes projected for this practicum were not met, opportunities to communicate with parents have worked to reveal the reality of working with parents. Helping parents understand contemporary education will not be accomplished in a twelve week practicum. Convincing people that "active learning" is an improvement over traditional instruction requires constant attention.

The Reality of Change

In spite of living in a rapidly changing world, change relating to attitudes does not happen rapidly. The practicum goal was ambitious and this effort to adjust parents' views of learning was a beginning.

Fullan (1991) outlines phases in the change process such that change is initiated, implemented, continued and institutionalized. He emphasizes that "real change" takes time. According to Fullan, "Change is a process and not an event" (p. 49).

Central to understanding change, is the need to consider "who" will change. In this practicum the focus was on the parents, but the teacher was required to change her practice in order to communicate with parents. It was necessary to move beyond the role of practitioner into the role of advocate. Through visits with parents, letters home and photos of classroom activities, the

teacher defined a new role for herself. In doing so, she initiated a change in the rele of the parent and child in education. The teacher caused both, to become involved in eduation. The "hidden curriculum" related to outcomes remains distant, unless one probes beyond the obvious results. Like the seed that lies dormant all winter and sprouts in its own time when the Spring comes, parents' understanding of young children's learning must be nurtured and rooted before it appears as a healthy plant.

If one should consider repeating the practicum, the following recommendations should be considered.

Recommendations

1. A future effort in changing parent views concerning learning should consider the recommendation to limit the focus of the practicum in order to inform parents about one area of the curriculum or to change parents' understanding of reading, spelling and mathematics instruction by adjusting the length of the practicum to be one year.

2. In future, it is recommended that three types of parent contacts be made: parent visits, "keeping in touch" letters and classroom photographs. Telephone calls can be made in order to make appointments.

3. In future, it is recommended that a rate of

return be calculated for three school events in order to determine a response rate for the parent questionnaire.

4. It is recommended that the teacher plan which information, relating to "active learning", would assist parents in becoming more supportive and plan, which parent contact, would be most appropriate in order to relay the information.

5. It is recommended that the teacher seek out parent opinions concerning aspects related to contemporary instruction and comment upon observations made concerning the sharing that goes on between the child and teacher during the parent visit in order that the parent acquires an understanding from observation and personal discussion.

Dissemination

Although this practicum did not reach the anticipated outcomes, it is necessary to consider "who" might benefit from hearing about it.

The knowledge gained from this effort may be of interest to the school principal. While he was aware of the project and has read the "keeping in touch" letters, the results will inform him about the scope of the practicum as well as the levels of support which parents have indicated.

It was the intention of this practicum to improve communication between the teacher and the parents. Since parents have been the focus of this effort, it is necessary to provide feedback concerning the results. An insert into the monthly newsletter will inform parents about understandings which were achieved thanks to their participation and co-operation in the practicum.

At the end of April, 1994, the primary teachers, on the staff, are meeting for professional development. The day permits opportunities for teachers to discuss and reflect upon educational activities. Informing others on staff about this practicum will help to break the isolation which is prevalent in elementary education. It offers options for interested colleagues to extend their practice towards making parent contacts. It demonstrates that educational solutions do not occur magically but emerge from ongoing experience.

Sharing with colleagues allows the teacher to share as a voice amongst colleagues and in the same breath recognize parents for what they are - participants in educating children. It will be difficult for parents to understand children's learning, if teachers do not participate in increasing the knowledge about "active

learning". Sharing this practicum with members of the profession provides an opportunity to send a postcard to the staff. At the bottom, it will read "Hope you'll join me soon!"

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APPENDIX

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

Kindly check the appropriate grade for your child.

My child is in Grade Two
Three

Please complete the following section by writing your response under each question. If more room is required, please use the back of this page.

1. What did your child do this term as a reader that demonstrated progress in reading was occuring? This can be a home or school activity.

2. What did your child do this term as a mathematician that demonstrated progress in mathematics was occuring? This can be a home or school activity.

3. What did your child do this term as a speller that demonstrated progress in spelling was occuring? This can be a home or school activity.

4. From the two choices provided on each line, select one by underlining the statement which best represents what you feel assists children in Grade 2 or 3 in becoming a good reader.

example:

The child looks at pictures in the book.	or	The child reads the book out loud.
The child reads a story from a reader.	or	The child spends 20 minutes a day reading.
The child completes workbook pages about the story.	or	The child talks about his/her book.
The child chooses books that are difficult to read.	or	The child chooses books that are easy to read.
The child skips words that s/he is unable to read.	or	The child sounds out every word while reading.

5. From the two choices provided on each line, select one by underlining the statement which best represents what you feel assists children in Grade 2 or 3 in becoming a good mathematician.

The child is able to write a story in which adding or subtracting occurs.	or	The child is able to add and subtract math facts quickly.
The child is able to recognize shapes: triangle, hexagon, trapazoid, parallelogram.	or	The child is able to build a cube.
The child is able to demonstrate which container holds more.	or	The child knows that short distances are measured in cm. and long distances are measured in km.

The child is able to follow a procedure in order to calculate a response.	or	The child uses manipulative objects in order to arrive at a response.

6. From the two choices provided on each line, select one by underlining the statement which best represents what you feel assists children in Grade 2 or 3 in becoming a good speller.

The child uses a rule to spell a word and mispells it.	or	The child explains that s/he remembered how to spell a word.
The child sounds out words when s/he does not know how to spell them.	or	The child asks an adult how to spell words that s/he does not know how to spell.
The child is taught spelling by taking a list of words home each week and writing a spelling test once a week.	or	The child notices how words are spelled when s/he reads.
The child reads over a story and highlights words that may be spelled incorrectly.	or	The child uses a spell check on a computer to correct his/her spelling.

7. How do you feel about the different contacts that have been used to inform you about your child's school experiences this term?